

## **HERSETH SANDLIN MEETS WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

**Washington, DC (April 29, 2010)**- Today, Rep. Herseth Sandlin met with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to discuss the importance of protecting the child custody rights of servicemembers. Rep. Herseth Sandlin attended the meeting along with Rep. Michael Turner of Ohio, the sponsor of H.R. 4469, legislation aimed at ensuring overseas deployment does not negatively impact the child custody rights of servicemembers.

"I appreciated Secretary Gates' willingness to meet with us and discuss the importance of protecting the child custody rights of our servicemembers," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "In the House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, which I chair, we have worked to improve the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to improve and protect the rights of servicemembers when it comes to issues such as employment and home loans affected by deployments, and I think the protection of child custody arrangements deserves equal consideration."

The Economic Opportunity Subcommittee held a legislative hearing on H.R. 4469 on Feb. 25 which explored this topic and different legislative approaches. The legislation prevents a court from permanently altering a custody order while a service member is deployed and prohibits courts from using deployments or the possibility of deployments against a servicemember when determining the best interests of a child. It sets a national standard for such protection and does not prevent individual states from passing stronger protections.

At the meeting, Sec. Gates committed to closely reviewing a report on this topic that was required as part of the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act that became law last year to determine if servicemembers need the added protections that H.R. 4469 would provide. Rep. Herseth Sandlin added, "It is important to establish a national standard on the custody rights of servicemembers. I am pleased that Sec. Gates is committed to a thorough review of this topic."

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